Episode 1,297: Marxism and Other Weirdness in English Departments

Guest: Allen Mendenhall

WOODS: I just got done telling people about your credentials. Here you are executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center for Law & Liberty, right?

MENDENHALL: That's correct.

WOODS: And you're associate dean — I went through the whole thing. But you're at a law school and all this, all right? And so I didn't know enough about your background. I thought, okay, well, obviously, he has a law background, and he's been wanting to be in law for a long time. And that's probably his whole life's aspiration. And then I look, and almost everything I'm seeing here, your education is mostly in English. And so when we were going to talk with this topic, I thought, well, this is going to be kind of a stretch for poor Allen, trying to talk about this stuff. But it's your whole thing. I didn't realize that. So then I asked you before we went on, "Well, okay, so then I guess you can understand why I'd be confused, given what you're currently doing now." And then you said you're currently doing what you're doing now, because...?

MENDENHALL: Well, because, basically, I'm not really welcome. I'm a persona non grata in English departments. If I could pick any job in the world that I could be, I would be an English professor writing poetry. But I come from an ideological perspective that is just not represented or even welcome in most English departments.

WOODS: If there were — well, look, I'm not going to say this. I probably shouldn't — this is an unfair question, given that I don't want your employer to think you're looking around. But if there were an opening at Hillsdale College in the English department, maybe they would want an Allen Mendenhall.

MENDENHALL: They may. That's true. There are schools out there — Faulkner University where I work, actually. I teach classes in the English Department, and it's got a great faculty. So there are places out there. I have gotten used to kind of the law faculty salary, which is much different.

WOODS: [laughing] Oh, yeah, sure.

MENDENHALL: But as far as research and writing, I still do most of my research and writing either in literature or from a literary perspective or angle.

WOODS: Isn't that funny? Because when I saw a *Literature and Liberty* among your books, I thought: well, it's that nice for him that he has the side interest? And I just did not realize it was the foundational thing. All right, in order to talk about what we're going to talk about, you were telling me that we need to start with some historical context by talking about actually the history of English departments. And I didn't know really there was such a history or, if there were, that anybody would know what it was. But apparently you do.

MENDENHALL: Well, yeah, it's something actually I'm very interested in. I mean, English departments today study literature written or translated in English: novels, short stories, plays, poetry, English composition, grammar, literary theory, criticism, rhetoric, philosophy of language, linguistics, semiotics, media and cultural studies, race, class, gender, women's studies, African American studies, disability studies — basically anything that could be written in English, English departments will try to cover. That means that they really have no clearly defined mission or purpose or identity or curriculum anymore. And given the new developments in higher ed, where the focus is on practical skills and jobs, English departments are struggling. They've lost rigor, and they've trended more and more toward leftist politics as their chief object of study. So they're in a state of — well, they're jeopardized. We'll put it that way.

But English departments actually began as English studies in Europe and America in the late 19th century. So in Europe, they focused on philology, which is study of language and literature and comparative linguistics and textual analysis of old manuscripts. And in America, they really involved rhetoric and primarily the study of English literature, British literature and Western canonical literature and translation. But they studied text for appreciation and form. They looked at poetic composition. Oration was part of the curriculum. It wasn't really until the 20th century, when English departments started replacing religion and classics departments as places where culture was studied, that you saw a gradual move toward a professionalization of the discipline, which involved the proliferation of literary criticism and theory.

Then you had the New Critics. They're really — all literary criticism today and literary theory today is written sort of against the New Critics of the early 20th century. You had Russian formalists like Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, who were attempting to distinguish literary text from other texts, so they were saying: well, what makes this thing literary versus something else which is not literary? And that involved analyzing the qualities and characteristics that made written representations compelling or aesthetic or moving, rather than just practical.

But the New Criticism was a little different. The new critics involved people like John Crowe Ransom and Cleanth Brooks and I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot and sort of the Southern literary critics. And they emphasized close reading and advocated isolating texts under consideration from all externalities, so things like an author's intent or the biography of an author or historical context. An analogy I like to draw is textualism and law, where judges look strictly at the language of a statute and not to legislative history or the supposed intent of the legislature, but they're just going to look only at the language of the text. And that's sort of what the New Critics were doing with literature and poetry. And they were doing this primarily as a pedagogical thing. They weren't advocating this as like the only way to read, but mainly just as a way to teach students how to read.

Well, fast forward a little bit, and you get structuralism and post-structuralism. And these actually are rooted in the linguistics of a Swiss linguist named Ferdinand de Saussure, who wrote right at the turn of the 19th, 20th century. And he analyzed how signs, linguistic signs were differentiated within a system of language. So when we issue an utterance or we speak or when we write, we do so within a framework of rules and conventions in which our audience also operates. So there's an implied order in which we communicate, and that's their structure referred to in structuralism. So Saussure's early. Now, you get these structuralists and post-structuralists who take that sort of linguistics and try to make stuff cultural out of it, try to analyze what that means for culture.

So Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, he extended that notion of linguistic structures to culture and suggested that beliefs and material creations and values and customs and characteristic features of a social group have an internal logic or structure to them, and function according to a set of just tacitly known rules. Those structures would be what we call discourse. So discourse isn't just language; it's actually got a cultural component to it. And structuralism dominated French intellectual life in the '60s, through figures like Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Louis Althusser, and it was through them that leftist politics was sort of imported into literary theory. You could already — you know, if you think about Marxism and the base superstructure, you can already sort of see where this might be headed when you look at the structuralism and how structuralism is all about this cultural analysis. You can kind of see where this is headed.

But then you get deconstruction, which is a movement that started primarily with Jacques Derrida. And by the way, these aren't really like super old things. I mean, Derrida only died in 2004. So this is still pretty recent stuff. But he borrowed from Saussure as well, in particular, from the theory that the meaning of a linguistic sign depends upon its relation to its opposite or other things from which it differs. So like, you know what male means because you know what female means; you know what a hero is because you know what a villain is; you know happiness because you know sadness; or goodness, badness; like, dislike; beautiful, ugly; all these kinds of different binaries. That's how you understand meaning. You understand what they are by putting them against their opposite.

So in that sense, any theoretical difference between two terms actually unites them in our mind and our consciousness. But here's where we get things — like we hear terms like privilege and stuff like that in our culture now. Well, according to deconstruction, one of those terms in the binaries always occupies a position of privilege, whereas the other is devalued. So the good and the bad, it's obvious that the good is privileged over the bad, or the hero is privileged over the villain, or the beautiful is privileged over the ugly. But what deconstruction wants to do is show that, actually, these terms don't really refer to anything tangible in the actual world, but they're all sort of signs that are arbitrary, and that they result in a hierarchy of binaries that is culturally contextual or arbitrary or just socially constructed, and they're not essential or fixed or definite across time and space.

So Derrida's theories had a broad impact in that they enabled him and his other followers to deconstruct not just signs, not just terms like male, female, or whatever, but also the concepts to which they referred. And a lot of these concepts were central to the Western tradition and Western culture. Also beginning in the '60s, you had people like Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson — who are still around, by the way, still alive, still writing — and they were explicit in their embrace of Marxism, kind of the Frankfurt School variety. And they were writing directly against the New Criticism and the New Critical approaches that divorced

literature from culture. So they tried to view literature as reflective of class and economic interests and culture and social and political structures and discourse and power. And you can see where this is headed. They are going to look at literature and literary texts and how they reproduce economic structures or conditions.

Well, then they had to run into objections that were like something like this: well, authors sometimes write against the culture, you know? They try to undermine or subvert the culture, so what do we do with those people? Well, they say, well, okay, if we're looking at how they undermine the culture, that's also a valid form of theory. We're going to look at how literature circulates in the marketplace and what that says about the culture and consumers and how it reinforces the superstructures or reifies dominance or a power group. And you have all kinds of people that are doing this. Writers that were both living and dead who sort of fall in this tradition would be like Brodsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, Louis Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, Terry Eagleton, Theodor Adorno, John Fiske, Walter Benjamin. And today, there's actually a move just to do political activism and politics, but to do it with sophistication by citing literature. So I'm just going to go out and do pure activism, and I'm going to cite Shakespeare while I do it, so it just sounds smarter.

I left out the New Historicism. That's also a big movement that was heavily influenced by Marxism. It was sort of popularized by Stephen Greenblatt. He's a Shakespearean scholar. But it would look at historical forces and conditions through the lens of structural and post-structuralism. And it would focus on like low-class or marginalized figures, texts that had been either neglected through history or characters that represented people or groups that had been neglected or marginalized through history. But there's a lot of discourse analysis in New Historicism, so a lot of focus on how literature and art circulate through discourse and either inform or subvert the culture. So basically, feminism, gender studies, cultural studies, critical race theory, post colonialism, all these different schools of literary criticism get pulled through one or more of those theoretical paradigms I've just described. I mean, there are more, and it's way more complex. There are more figures than I just mentioned, but that's just sort of like the nutshell version of how we got where we got.

And so now we have a whole discipline where people are writing literary theory and criticism, and they don't really even know about the residual Marxism in which they're working. They've just been immersed in the discipline, initiated into the discourse, and they don't really even understand that, oh, what we're doing when we use words like privilege and alienation and commodification and fetishism and materialism and superstructure and hegemony and all these things — they don't even really realize that what they're doing is they're working out of a deeply embedded network of Marxist criticism and Marxist theory, and they've just inherited it. And they don't really fully understand it. Some do; some don't. And some of these people are good, nice people; they just have been, I guess, indoctrinated really is the best word for it. I mean, they're well meaning, but they don't fully understand what they're doing, and they've never studied economics, and there really are no free-market paradigms available to them, other than, you know, Paul Cantor's work and a few others, Stephen Cox. But you're not going to find that stuff anthologized in a literary theory anthology.

So that's sort of how you get to the state of things where we are now, and it's not surprising to me that English departments are struggling in light of the fact that they're out there teaching Marxist criticism, or at least iterations of Marxist criticism to students who are really trying to go out and make a better life for themselves and get jobs and not have to go into debt. And you know, they don't have time for all this discredited economic stuff that is really, really

harmful to society. Now, I'm all for teaching that stuff, because it's important for people to know it. It's important for students to know it. But it's also important for students to have alternatives and to be able to challenge and push back against it. What you get a lot is faculty who are so ideological that they won't let their students push back against it or represent another point of view: conservatism, libertarianism, whatever it is.

WOODS: You mentioned Paul Cantor. He's probably the only English professor who studied at Ludwig von Mises' NYU seminar back in the day.

MENDENHALL: He's the only one I know, yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, so I had him on the show some time ago, so I'll link to that episode for those who are interested in this kind of topic at TomWoods.com/1297. So tell me, then — I do want to get into your own educational experience in a minute, but just while we have this fresh in our minds, what would be different if I were to compare the way you would teach a particular text — a novel, a short story, a poem, whatever — how you would handle it, as opposed to how the ideologues you're describing would handle it?

MENDENHALL: Well, I guess there are two different approaches. Like one is, if you were to take sort of an Austrian economic approach, you could accept the turn away from New Criticism and toward cultural studies, but examine how subjective individual motivations influence not only the literary texts that are written, but also those that are purchased and circulated in the culture like Paul Cantor does. I mean, Paul Cantor looks at commercial culture and markets to show that aesthetic merit is a bottom-up rather than a top-down process. It's not just dictated by fiat from the cultural elite, but it's by who purchases books. And he looks at people like Dickens and shows that, you know, a lot of people thought Dickens was just writing trash in his day, just the serialized novel was just garbage. And now he's a canonical figure, and that was something that consumers determined and not some elite group of people.

I think it's interesting to look at the subjective theory of value in Austrian economics and try to translate that into the literary sphere. And you would do that by saying something like texts don't have inherent literary merit just because of their form and content. I mean, that's part of it. But also they have merit because the text operates within a culture, and it operates within discursive norms. So you substitute literary merit for price, and you examine the reasons for the worth of a book, for its cultural currency, I guess you could say. And you focus on consumer tastes and preferences rather than strictly on an author's craft.

Of course, there are a lot of books out there that deal with economics. Ayn Rand's novels or *The Grapes of Wrath*, property in Jane Austen's novels, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Death of a Salesman*, and I could go on for a long time. And so you could actually look at those books, and there has been a good deal of economic theory applied to the analysis of those books, but not from a free-market perspective. So you could either go in and sort of try to take apart that analysis, or you could try to create your own analysis that is not just attributing everything bad to capitalism.

But the other thing, and this is sort of something that Hans Hermann Hoppe does. But his work is, he says, all right, I'm not going to throw the baby out with the bathwater. If there are some Marxist critics out there that have some useful thing to offer, I'm going to work with it. And I mentioned Althusser earlier. He has this idea called ideological state apparatuses,

calls them ISAs. And the term refers to apparatuses of the state that are allegedly controlled by capitalists who use them to perpetuate ideologies that help the capitalists subjugate the lower classes and the proletariat and the ideological state apparatuses ensure that the ruling class reproduces its power and controls the means of production, and all that kind of stuff. And these ISAs ensure that ideology interpenetrates law and art and culture and all that stuff.

But people like you and I, we know that free-market capitalism and the state are actually incompatible, but we see things out there that look like ideological state apparatuses to us. So we can actually agree to some extent with Althusser about the way these ISAs function, but show them how free markets can help us out of that entrenched system. Like we can identify the same bad guys that he does, and we could call it crony capitalism or mercantilism and all these different things, and show him that, hey, actually, we're the good guys here. You're identifying the right problems, but let us show you a more constructive way out. And so that's another approach that I think could be taken, where you actually concede a little bit and you say, *Hey, look, I'm not out just a totally smear you. I'll take some of what you've got and say, hey, there's, there's actually some merit to it. But let me tell you my perspective. Let me give you an alternative way of looking at this.* So that's another way to do it.

WOODS: I'm curious now to actually get into your educational background. So you tell me that, at Furman University — where I've spoken before, and I know a couple of graduates from Furman. You said that things were better there, and at first, I thought, oh, maybe there were some old-timey professors. No, what you just meant was old-timey leftists who were at least openminded enough to listen to what you had to say and could at least stand the sight of you.

MENDENHALL: Yeah.

WOODS: Then after that, you went elsewhere, and so tell me some of those stories.

MENDENHALL: Well, yeah, I mean, at Furman, the faculty were sort of old-school leftists. They were openminded and willing to entertain different views. And they actually studied literature for its merit and for its qualities and content, and they weren't just there to convert young people into some ideological viewpoint. Now, I went to West Virginia, and there was a little bit of a mixed bag. That's where I actually got my law degree and my master's in English degree simultaneously. I went to law school during the day, and I took my English classes at night. And that's where I really started reading a lot of theory. And I'm actually not hostile to theory, per se. I think it's important for us to read it, and to know where these authors are coming from, because I think it explains a lot about our culture today. I mean, when you look at the ideas like gender is socially constructed, and then it's fluid and it exists along the spectrum of possibilities and you can kind of pick and choose, well, all that comes out of these things that are taught in literary theory classes. And it helps to be familiar with all that stuff. And you can kind of see, like, oh, *this* is how we got where we are.

So I was exposed to a lot of literary theory and criticism in my master's program, and that carried over into my PhD program. After I got my master's in law and my JD, I got an LLM, which is a master's in law from Temple. And then I went and got my PhD in English, which, by the way, I would not advise that anybody do this kind of stuff. I have a lot of skepticism about

higher ed these days, and about the types of education that are being provided by universities.

But at any rate, when I got into my PhD program, I did kind of butt heads with some people that didn't like what I was doing. Part of it is I wrote my book *Literature and Liberty* while I was still a graduate student. So I was still in my PhD program when that book was published. And so I had faculty there reading it saying, *Who is this student that's, you know, saying bad stuff about English departments? Who does he think he is? He wants to get a PhD from our program, and he's bashing English departments*. And, you know, that wasn't a good way to make friends. And I did an interview with Jeffrey Tucker when he was at the Mises Institute during that time, and of course, that video circulated widely, and it got back to my dissertation advisor at that time.

WOODS: Oh.

MENDENHALL: And she was very upset with me. In fact, we had such a big falling out that I had to get the university ombudsman involved and had to get a new dissertation advisor. But it was a long process. I mean, it took I can't remember how long, but it took a couple months, if I had to ballpark it. And she was accusing me of all kinds of things that I never said or never did, basically, because she just presupposed what a libertarian would think. I would write — I mean, my dissertation was on Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., not somebody that really shares a lot of ideological affinities. You know, it was completely politically neutral. But she would read into things that I had written, stuff that to me was just an absurd reading, and she would accuse me of having all these perspectives, and I was thinking, like, what kind of tendentious reading is this?

And eventually, I had to get a new advisor to come in. I had to get the administration involved. It was a big deal. And it made me wish — you know, I'd actually talked to Paul Cantor before I went to law school about studying under him and getting PhD under him. But my wife was working at Coca Cola in Atlanta at the time, and it just wasn't going to work out. I was in the Georgia Bar, so I stayed in Atlanta and commuted to Auburn. And Auburn, long story, but I've got a very deep and old family history there. It was always second home, so it made perfect sense to go there. But at that moment, I remember thinking, *Gosh, I wish I had figured out a way to do this with Paul* [laughing]. One of his former students is in the English department at Auburn, and he is kind of an openminded person. But that person, I never took a class with him and didn't have him on my committee and didn't really even know him. I still don't know him. But that would have been a better option for me.

However, when I got my new dissertation advisor, I sort of just sailed right through. I was done months after that. It wasn't even a year after that. I had essentially written the whole dissertation already, and my first advisor would never let my chapters get to my committee members. She was trying to control them and not let them read it. And then when I got my new advisor, he sent them on, and I got great, constructive feedback from my other committee members, and was able to just sort of sail through. And it was shortly after that — I mean, as soon as I got through the program, my book was accepted for publication with Bucknell University Press and published. And you know, all these things my advisor said were completely discredited by the peer reviewers of the book manuscript, by the other members of my committee. And you know, it was just basically an ideological stalemate that I was in, and until I broke free of it — I mean, I had that advisor for two years and didn't have another

committee member for two years even read a single chapter, and then as soon as I had a new advisor, boom, boom, boom, boom. PhD was done and I was through the program.

WOODS: Well, you must get goosebumps when you hear the story of Murray Rothbard's dissertation. Very similar situation with Arthur Burns holding it up, and we now know it was a great dissertation when it became a book on the Panic of 1819. It was reviewed very well in the professional journals, but Arthur Burns was giving him a hard time. And then finally he went to work to the Nixon administration, and then Rothbard sailed through.

MENDENHALL: Well, it's amazing, and when you hear stories like this, you think, well, how many students out there could have been the next Murray Rothbard, but they were denied it by some ideologue? And that really is disturbing.

WOODS: Yeah, I mean — ugh, I don't want to bring this back to the story of my own, but I'll just say that on my dissertation committee, for some — I don't know why. I honestly don't know what — there must have been a lot of 20th century historians on sabbatical or something. But I had somebody on my committee who really was an urban historian, and here I was writing an intellectual history that he had no interest in whatsoever. And the rest of the committee — I mean, he approved it. The rest of the committee loved it, and the guy who specialized in my area, whom I had never met before, came over and said, "I love this dissertation so much that I want you to make it into a book for a series I'm doing for Columbia University Press." And like, okay, this is the guy I most wanted to impress, and he's the guy who likes it. Then the urban historian comes over and says, "Tom, you're so much better than this dissertation," or whatever. Obviously he just hated having to do it, right [laughing]?

MENDENHALL: Yeah.

WOODS: This is so far out of his area, benefits him in no way. So it was just pettiness on his part. And I thought, gee, thank goodness that other person already spoke to me, or I would feel really bad right now.

MENDENHALL: Yeah, it's —

WOODS: So sometimes it's just pettiness. Sometimes it's not ideologically motivated.

MENDENHALL: Well, and that's true. I think you see that with peer reviews sometimes. People will write these articles, and peer reviewers will send it back, and one peer reviewer loves it and thinks it's amazing, and the other peer reviewer thinks it's just terrible. And their comments contradict each other, and you think: what do you do with this? So you know, there is stuff like that I think that's kind of petty, and I don't know how you — I mean, I wish we could sit here and fix the problems of peer review, but I really don't even know where to begin with that.

WOODS: Well, do you think, let's say, somebody goes and studies English at a community college? Is there any chance that you might just get a regular person who just loves literature who's going to just teach it to them? In other words, are they going to be less likely to be infected by these ideological aspects? Whereas at a four-year school where there's a lot of pressure to publish, the professors are constantly thinking in terms of these categories.

MENDENHALL: Yeah, that's an interesting theory. I don't know. In short, I don't know. But I do know if you go — because I just don't know that many faculty who are teaching in community colleges, other than people that are trying to get into the four-year program. But I know at small Christian liberal arts colleges, for example, like Faulkner, our faculty are like what you described. They love literature. They're there for what they believe literature offers, which is an insight into the human condition, and that it addresses sort of perennial themes that are relevant at any age and generation. And so I do think there are people like that who are out there, but it's difficult for them to publish. They don't have sort of the money on their side. They don't have the institutions or departments on their side. And I mean departments in the broader sense, not at their institutions, but more broadly, people that are with the MLA and things like that who, they're just not on their side. So you know, they've got an uphill battle, and they've got to find outlets where they can publish. And even when they do, they have to sort of demonstrate: *hey, I get the discourse that you're working in. I understand your terms and your jargon and this, so I've got to throw some of that around to show, okay, I have a facility with it. That's not what I'm doing, but I have to show at least that I understand it before you'll publish my stuff.* And so you get some kind of superfluous material in a lot of articles just to kind of show, *Hey, I'm with it*. But yeah, that's an interesting question. I really don't know about community college, but that makes sense. I wish there were a way to analyze that empirically. That would be an interesting task.

WOODS: Well, I was just wondering if really — because what I was leading up to is, if people really love some branch of Western literature, are you proposing that really, they ought to just either study it themselves or maybe find somebody online who just loves it, who's not dedicated to any of the craziness, who just loves it? Is that the approach to take? Do you have to avoid these departments altogether?

MENDENHALL: Well, I think what you'd have to do is, you'd have to find someone like Paul Cantor and approach that person and study under that person. And that's for graduate students. I don't know what you do as an undergraduate. You just kind of have to — I mean, like I said earlier, I think it's important to learn this stuff and understand that perspective, and if you're aware of that perspective, then you're less likely to be sort of indoctrinated or whatever by it. But I actually don't think it's harmful to have this — I mean, for example, when I was an undergraduate, I was actually a man of the left. And it was through studying Marxism and through studying all these other stuff that I moved right and I became a libertarian, and I became much more culturally conservative, as well. And it was because I had just this deep aversion to what I was learning. It was like, oh, I thought I was on the left, but now that I actually see what this stuff represents, that's not me at all. Like, this is destructive stuff. So I moved right, and I would never have done that if I hadn't been exposed to some of these theories. I mean, who knows? I might be out there campaigning for Hillary Clinton or something; I don't know. But thankfully, I read this stuff and learned to pick them apart and thought for myself.

And that's really what I would encourage students who are going into college to do, is just be a free thinker about things, have an open mind. I know, Immanuel Kant defined the Enlightenment as the freedom from your self-incurred tutelage, and I think that's actually a good thing to bear in mind as you go into college, if that's what you decide to do, is: go in there with a humble heart. Don't think you know everything, because you don't, and an open mind and explore. Follow questions to where they lead, and challenge things, and challenge your professors. Make them explain in a way that convinces you. And if they can't, then there's probably a serious flaw in what they're trying to teach you.

WOODS: Let's see. One more thing before I let you go. You have a book called *Literature and Liberty*. I should be looking at that, and we should be doing an episode on that, shouldn't we?

MENDENHALL: Oh, I would love to do that. That'd be great.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. If you have an electronic version that's easily sent to me, then that wouldn't cost you anything. Let's see if we can —

MENDENHALL: Sure, well, I'll even send you a hard copy.

WOODS: Oh, well, I appreciate that, but I don't like people being out of pocket if I can avoid it.

MENDENHALL: No, it's not — I've got plenty of copies for that purpose.

WOODS: Well, can you just say a word, a tantalizing word that maybe will leave people hanging until our next conversation about what it is that you've done with literature and liberty that brings them together? I mean, obviously, we can see how literature has been used by people on the left to pursue particular agendas. Are you trying to do the same thing from a libertarian point of view, or are you doing something completely different?

MENDENHALL: Well, I think I'm doing something different, because I — and I'm not like a systematizer, I guess, and in particular, I'm not in that book, especially because what I really do there is I say, look, I'm not creating some sort of formula here for libertarian literary criticism. I'm just giving — each chapter is different chapter. There's a chapter on Shakespeare, a chapter on Emerson, a chapter on Twain. And they're there. They're wide-ranging subjects, so I'm already not really chronologically located. I traverse broad sweeps of time and space in the book. But what I'm saying is: these chapters are all thematically linked. They're all about liberty, and they each provide a different way, a different example of how you might do libertarian literary criticism. You know, I'm not trying to go out and say this is the libertarian version of Brodsky or something, and I'm going to — just each chapter just has a different approach and a different method, but they are favorable to free markets. And so I try to give future students or scholars a way that they could build on that and do things their own way. I think Paul Cantor has much more than I have, and Paul Cantor's really developed kind of a comprehensive approach to what he's doing. And you can sort of see his work in commercial culture as part of a unified effort, whereas mine is slightly more scattered but thematically connected under the rubric of libertarianism.

WOODS: I was just looking at your website, and I'm not sure which one you would send people to. Is it the blog one?

MENDENHALL: Well, AllenMendenhall.com is my personal website. I have a blog called The Literary Lawyer, but AllenMendenhall.com is where my books are, it's where a lot of my writing is, and a lot of my blogging is linked to through there. So that's probably the central location, so to speak.

WOODS: Okay, okay. So Allen is A-L-L-E-N, AllenMendenhall.com is the website to check out, and we'll link to some other of your stuff there. And we'll get you back on, and we'll talk more about this. But this is, at least people get a glimpse into what's going on. And it's very

frustrating and maddening that that's a legitimate field. It's an honorable field, and now it's like completely off limits, and it's very sad and demoralizing. But at least, you know — well, I don't even know what the "at least" is. At least we have — I don't know. What do we have [laughing]?

MENDENHALL: [laughing] I don't know. I don't know. I mean, I think at least we might be seeing creative destruction underway. It might be just falling apart, and something better is going to take its place.

WOODS: At some point, you would think that's got to happen. And at some point, there are people who just love literature, who will go around the official institutions and make their own courses somewhere.

MENDENHALL: And that's what you see when you go to Borders and Barnes and Noble or whatever. I don't know, one of those isn't even open anymore, I don't think. But you go in there and you see sort of the bestselling racks, and it's all these great canonical works in Western literature.

WOODS: Right.

MENDENHALL: So the consumers are still buying the great stuff right.

WOODS: Right. Right, well meanwhile, we do have a course at LibertyClassroom.com by Deidre Birzer on the *Little House on the Prairie* book series.

MENDENHALL: Great.

WOODS: Which, of course, now that's also out of fashion, which is precisely why we wanted to do the course. So that is some consolation. All right, well, thanks a lot, Allen. We'll talk again soon.

MENDENHALL: Thanks, Tom. Thanks for having me.